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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of Saturday morning cartoons on children's perceptions of social reality. The study consisted of an analysis of programs appearing between 8 and 11 o'clock in the morning on September 15, 1990, and June 9, 1992, focusing on the ethnicity, gender, and age of characters, the positive or negative portrayal of characters, and the characters' positions of authority. The study found that the Saturday morning cartoons reviewed contained few older characters, and that the majority of these were depicted as either evil or incompetent. Of the characters whose ethnicity could be determined, 32 percent belonged to ethnic minorities, though fully 60 percent of these minority characters were in one show ("Kid 'N Play"). Only 17.8 percent of the characters in 1990 and 23.8 percent in 1992 were female. Cartoon settings, plot types, values, morality, and inherent consumerism are also analyzed and discussed. Overall, the paper concludes that Saturday morning children's programming teaches children that white men are the most important and powerful people in society; that women are underrepresented everywhere; that the world is a scary place; and, that they should belong and be loyal to a group and never act on their own. (Contains 23 references.) (MDM)

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SATURDAY MORNING CARTOONS AND CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL REALITY

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In 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a report entitled *Television and Behavior* which reviewed the over 2,500 available studies on television viewing and its effects on human development and behavior. Among many other issues, the report looked at the influences of television on attitudes, values, and beliefs, and found substantial evidence that people's attitudes and behaviors concerning violence, race, gender, sexuality, consumerism, and many other things could be significantly influenced by how much and what they watched on television. Its authors also concluded that television had become a major socializing agent of American children.

The report went on to state, "In addition to socialization, television influences how people think about the world around them or what is sometimes called their conceptions of 'social reality.' Studies have been carried out on the amount of fear and mistrust of other people, and on the prevalence of violence, sexism, family values, racial attitudes, illness in the population, criminal justice, and affluence. On the whole, it seems that television leads its viewers to have television influenced attitudes." In other words, viewers tend to accept and internalize the attitudes, values, and behaviors portrayed on broadcast television. No viewers as vulnerable to such process as children.

Television provides all people with a window on the larger world, but the view through that window has a far greater influence on children's sense of it, simply because their individual worlds are so constricted, their experience so limited, and their perception of social reality so plastic. As Aimee Dorr (1986) points out, the most important social learning usually occurs during childhood. "This is the time," she writes (pg. 13), "when individuals learn what must be known if they are to function in their culture." When one considers that by the time they graduate from high school, American children will have spent more time in front of TV sets than in classrooms, it is not surprising that Dorr finds that the major role broadcast television plays in children's lives is that of "an information-providing experience -- a source of knowledge or prejudice, a teacher of ... how to play, fight, and love." (pg. 60)

Television depictions of social reality tend mainly to reinforce adults' world views. Children, on the other hand, especially young children, don't have preconceived notions about society and its workings, nor experience against which to test televised versions of these. They also, to a greater or lesser extent, tend to think everything they see on television is "real" (Christenson & Roberts,

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1983). Indeed, our own research with eight- and nine-year olds suggests they find the characters, situations, and story-lines depicted even in Saturday morning cartoons realistic (Beasich, Leinoff & Swan, 1992). In addition, children are more likely to be able to follow cartoon stories than those of other programs, hence, more likely to internalize the social realities depicted in them.

Saturday morning is the only block of programming time devoted exclusively to children. If television has become a major socializing agent of American children, then Saturday morning cartoons represent at least one of the primary texts for their social learning. This chapter examines that text through content and critical analyses of all programs broadcast between 8:00 am and 11:00 am on Saturday, September 15, 1990, and again on Saturday, June 9, 1992 (after the Children's Television Act of 1990 went into effect). These included:

SEPTEMBER 15, 1990

Muppet Babies; 8 - 9 am, CBS
Garfield and Friends; 9 - 10 am, CBS
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles; 10 - 11 am, CBS
New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh; 8 - 8:30 am, ABC
The Wizard of Oz; 8:30 - 9 am, ABC
Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters; 9 - 10 am, ABC
Beetlejuice; 10 - 10:30 am, ABC
New Kids on the Block; 10:30 - 11 am, ABC
Camp Candy; 8 - 8:30 am, NBC
Captain N and Super Mario Brothers; 8:30 - 9:30 am, NBC
Gravedale High; 9:30 - 10 am, NBC
Kid N' Play; 10 - 10:30 am, NBC
The Chipmunks Go to the Movies; 10:30 - 11 am, NBC

JUNE 9, 1992

Captain Planet and the Planeteers; 8 - 9 am, CBS
Garfield and Friends; 9 - 10 am, CBS
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles; 10 - 11 am, CBS
New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh; 8 - 8:30 am, ABC
Land of the Lost; 8:30 - 9 am, ABC
Darkwing Duck; 9 - 9:30 am, ABC
Beetlejuice; 9:30 - 10:30 am, ABC
Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters; 10:30 - 11:30 am, ABC
Space Cats; 8 - 8:30 am, NBC
Yo, Yogi; 8:30 - 9 am, NBC
Captain N and Super Mario Brothers; 9 - 9:30 am, NBC
Pro Stars; 9:30 - 10 am, NBC
Wish Kid; 10 - 10:30 am, NBC
Saved By the Bell; 10:30 - 11 am, NBC

In reviewing the social reality depicted in Saturday morning cartoons, it is important to note that it is, in at least two meaningful senses, a "derived reality."

Firstly, the situations, in particular the characters and settings, found in the vast majority (12/13 or 92.3% in 1990, and 9/14 or 64.3% in 1992) of the programs we analyzed were adapted from other media -- books, movies, famous personalities, video games, comics, and other TV shows (TABLE 1). It might be argued, then, that the social reality depicted on Saturday mornings is largely serendipitous -- that is, it is the haphazard amalgamation of the cartoon adaptations of previously contrived situations. Two observations, however, suggest otherwise.

To begin with, it is obvious that any adaptation process is highly selective, and so, that the materials selected for adaptation as Saturday morning cartoons were selected precisely for their popularity with young audiences and their (not unrelated) "fit" with established Saturday morning formulae. Secondly, most of the cartoon adaptations we looked at included changes in social reality elements favoring the same such formulae. For example, the setting in the cartoon version of *Beetlejuice* is suburban, not rural as in the movie. *Beetlejuice*, the cartoon also focuses on an adolescent character less central, diminishes the adult characters more central, and adds several adolescent characters not present in the movie version. Even more telling, perhaps, is the fact that the plots of these cartoon adaptations bear little, if any, resemblance to those of the material from which they came. They rather resemble nothing so much as each other.

TABLE 1
Derivation of Saturday Morning Cartoons

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**
comic	2/13**	15.4%	2/14**	14.4%
book	2/13*	15.4%	1/14*	7.1%
movie	3/13	23.0%	3/14	21.5%
TV show	2/13	15.4%	1/14	7.1%
video game	1/13	7.7%	1/14	7.1%
personalities	2/13	15.4%	1/14	7.1%
TOTAL DERIVED	**12/13**	**92.3%**	**9/14**	**64.3%**
TOTAL ORIGINAL	**1/13**	**7.7%**	**5/14**	**35.7%**

* are also movies
** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was also later made into movies

A second important way in which the social reality found in Saturday morning programming is a derived reality involves the formal properties of animated cartoons themselves. It is simply that animated cartoons are derived versions of traditional film and video, more iconic and less realistic renditions of regular television fare. It might therefore be suggested that children are less likely to view cartoons as "real," which is true (Dorr, 1986), hence, that children are less likely to internalize the social reality they portray, which is most probably not true.

Iconic images simplify reality. They strip what they represent to their essential qualities, making these easier, not harder to assimilate. In addition, iconic images invite participation; their very lack of specificity encourages viewers to identify with cartoon characters (McCloud, 1994). It can be argued, then, that the derived formal reality of Saturday morning cartoons is especially well constructed for children to begin learning about the larger society in which they find themselves, and to begin developing notions of their place in it.

This chapter is divided into four parts. Each part explores a different dimension of social reality as seen through the derived reality of Saturday morning programming. Part one considers the age, ethnic, and gender make-up of cartoon characters, and the effects those depictions might have on children's developing notions of their larger world. Part two is concerned with the workings of that larger world as portrayed in the settings and plots found in Saturday morning programming. Part three examines the morals and values expressed in the themes of Saturday morning cartoons and compares these with the morals and values expressed in the themes of such traditional children's stories as fairy tales, fables, and myths. Part four deals with Saturday morning commercials and commercialism. It looks not only at the commercials aired during Saturday morning programming, but at the pervasive marketing of products based on the programs themselves.

Age, Ethnicity, and Gender

The characters found in Saturday morning cartoons, even the talking animals, can be seen to have obvious ages and genders. They are old or young, male or female. Many cartoon characters, the human ones at least, also have an obvious ethnicity. These age, ethnic, and gender depictions in Saturday morning programming impact young viewers' developing conceptions of social reality in important ways.

Most importantly, perhaps, when one sort of person is over and over again portrayed in a particular way, such depictions can contribute to the development of stereotypes. For example, if

old men are over and over again portrayed as incompetent (as is indeed the case in Saturday morning programming), viewers of these portrayals will come to believe that old men are incompetent, especially when they have had little personal experience of old men themselves. Once embraced, such stereotypes are hard to dislodge. If, for example, a child has come to think old men are incompetent, he or she will tend to perceive them that way, regardless of the reality.

Gerbner (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980) likens the effects of stereotypic television portrayals on developing notions of what differing groups of people are like to the cumulative effects of cultivation on a crop. He argues that, although a single viewing of a particular kind of person portrayed in a particular way will have little effect on viewers' images of that sort of person, when one sort of person is *over and over again* depicted as having the same characteristics, viewers will begin to believe that all people of that sort share such characteristics. Similarly, the cumulative effects of viewing particular kinds of people over and over again in the same kinds of roles can strongly impact the developing child's notions of their own and others' places in the world.

To analyze age, ethnic, and gender depictions in Saturday morning cartoons, each program appearing between 8:00 am and 11:00 am on September 15, 1990 and June 9, 1992 was viewed, and all its major characters listed on a rating sheet. Raters were asked to give each character's ethnicity, gender, and age, and to tell whether the character was portrayed as good or evil, as competent or incompetent, and as being in a position of authority or not. Two raters reviewed each program and discrepancies between ratings were resolved by the author with reference to the program tapes. In this manner, a total of 123 characters were identified as appearing in the programs aired on September 15, 1990, and a total of 105 characters were found in the programs aired on June 9, 1992 (Knowles & Swan, 1992). All of the characters identified could be classified in terms of age and gender, thus all were included in those analyses. Many characters, however, had to be discounted when considering ethnicity, either because they definitely had no ethnicity (dogs, cats, aliens, etc.), or because their ethnicity was dubious. In terms of ethnicity, then, only 61/123 (1990) and 91/105 (1992) characters could be studied.

The relative ages of the characters found in the Saturday morning cartoons we reviewed are summarized in TABLE 2. It shows that the demographics of these programs were skewed toward young characters, although a good deal less so in 1992 than in 1990. Such findings are neither surprising, nor, in themselves, disturbing. It makes sense to overpopulate cartoons with young characters with whom young viewers can identify. The extremely low representation of older people in cartoons, however, is unrealistic and perhaps emblematic of American society's

increasing propensity to separate senior citizens from its mainstream. Even more disturbing is that the very few older characters we found in both 1990 and 1992 were depicted as either incompetent or evil. Indeed, the general trend we saw in the characterizations of both years would suggest that the older the character, the more likely they are to be either evil or incompetent or both. This is clearly not a healthy message to impart, intended or not.

TABLE 2
Age of Saturday Morning Cartoon Characters

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**
total young	92/123	74.8%	60/105	57.1%
total adult	27/123	21.9%	42/105	40.0%
total old	4/123	3.3%	3/105	2.9%

TABLE 3 gives a summary of the ethnicity of the characters found in Saturday morning cartoons. In 1990, of the characters whose ethnicity could be determined, 32% belonged to ethnic minorities, mostly Black. While this might, on the surface, appear to be a good representation, a full 60% of the total minorities represented (12/20) were found on a single show, *Kid 'N Play*, which was an all minority show about a rap group. The remaining minority group characters in 1990 included two female Black teenagers in *Camp Candy*, Luigi and Julio Mario (Italian) in *Captain N and Super Mario Brothers*, and four Black males given token supporting roles on other programs. Almost half the cartoons we reviewed from 1990 had no minority representation at all.

Luigi and Julio Mario made the ethnic count again in 1992, where, without the ghetto of *Kid 'N Play*, minority representation was down to 16.5%, and, again, fully half the shows had no minority representation at all. The majority of ethnic characters, and the only variety therein, were found on *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, which took pains to include Black, Asian, and Hispanic characters. Other ethnic characters found in 1992 included two Black males with leading roles in *Pro Stars* (How could a show based on famous athletes not include Black men?); the rest were token Black roles in *Ghostbusters, Saved by the Bell, Wish Kid*, and an updated *Yo, Yogi*.

It would seem, then, that Saturday morning cartoons are a lot like American society. They have their own ethnic ghettos, and, with the exception of a few shows, give only token representation to ethnic minorities outside these. While this may indeed reflect power relationships in the larger society, it does not reflect the America many of us would like to see. If we would

have our children create a better, more integrated America, shouldn't we be presenting them with images of what such a world might be like? Perhaps more importantly, shouldn't we be presenting minority children with role models other than athletes and rap performers to which they can aspire? In this vein, it is also important to note that, except for the characters in *Kid 'N Play* and *Pro Stars* based on real people, the minority characters we found in Saturday morning cartoons tended to lack ethnicity; rather they were darker, Spanish speaking versions of middle class Whites.

One of the most disappointing findings in our analyses of minority representation in cartoon programming concerns the number of Black female roles, 2/61 (3.2%) in 1990 and 2/91 (2.2%) in 1992. It is even more disappointing when one realizes that these two singular characters were found together in the same program in both years (*Camp Candy* in 1990; *Yo, Yogi* in 1992). There were also no older minority characters in the programming we studied, nor was a member of an ethnic minority portrayed as evil. While it may be the case that it is still important to portray minorities exclusively as "nice" people, the figures for Black females and the total lack of older ethnic characters seems unjustifiable in terms of the actual demographics of the American population.

TABLE 3
Ethnicity by Gender of Saturday Morning Cartoon Characters

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**
Black female	2/61	3.2%	2/91	2.2%
Black male	12/61	19.2%	8/91	8.8%
total Black	**14/61**	**22.4%**	**10/91**	**11.0%**
Hispanic male	3/61	4.8%	0/91	0.0%
Hispanic female	0/61	0.0%	1/91	1.1%
total Hispanic	**3/61**	**4.8%**	**1/91**	**1.1%**
Asian male	0/61	0.0%	1/91	1.1%
Asian female	0/61	0.0%	1/91	1.1%
total Asian	**0/61**	**0.0%**	**2/91**	**2.2%**
Italian male	2/61	4.8%	2/91	2.2%
total other	**2/61**	**4.8%**	**2/91**	**2.2%**
TOTAL MINORITIES	**20/61**	**32.0%**	**15/91**	**16.5%**

In terms of the actual demographics of the American population, the general gender representation we found in Saturday morning programming (summarized in TABLE 4) is clearly also unjustifiable. Female characters were much more evenly distributed across the programs studied than were minority characters, but the total representation of female characters (17.8% in 1990 and 23.8% in 1992) was very disappointing. Considering that females account for more than 50% of the population at large, this is a serious imbalance. Interestingly, proportionately more females than males were rated as generally competent, although, by proportion, slightly more males than females were found in positions of authority. Again, while this may mirror power relations in the real world, it cannot really be the case that we want to socialize our young girls to expect and/or accept such conditions.

In 1990, the portrayal of women in the programs we reviewed was generally stereotypic. Apart from Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Lydia in *Beetlejuice*, and Miss Piggy in the *Muppet Babies*, female cartoon characters played supporting roles. Lydia and Miss Piggy, moreover, are not very sympathetic characters (Miss Piggy is pushy and violent; Lydia is odd) and Dorothy, while ostensibly the major character, remained tangential to the storylines and the action in *The Wizard of Oz*. Like Dorothy, the supporting female characters found in 1990 cartoons were all very "nice," and all quite tangential to the stories. These characters were almost uniformly pretty, tended to be concerned about their appearance, and were generally taken care of by male characters. There was a high proportion of princesses.

TABLE 4
Gender by Age of Saturday Morning Cartoon Characters

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**
young female	15/123	12.2%	13/105	12.4%
adult female	5/123	4.0%	11/105	10.4%
old female	2/123	1.6%	1/105	1.0%
TOTAL FEMALE	**22/123**	**17.8%**	**25/105**	**23.8%**
young male	77/123	62.8%	47/105	44.8%
adult male	22/12317.8%		31/105	29.5%
old male	2/1231	1.6%	2/105	1.9%
TOTAL MALE	**101/123**	**82.2%**	**80/105**	**76.2%**

In 1992, the situation regarding the stereotyping of women in cartoon programming was recognizably better. While there were still princesses and stereotypic supporting female characters,

an effort was made (especially in action/adventure shows) to include at least one female character who participated fully in the action of a storyline and/or who held a position of authority. Nonethe-less, all the group leaders and all the central protagonists (except for the indefatigable Lydia) in the 1992 programming were male, and male characters still outnumbered female characters by more than three to one. This undeniable and continuing under-representation must be having some effect on young girls. That males still overwhelmingly dominate the cast of cartoon characters socializes all children to believe they somehow "deserve" greater social recognition and status. At the very least, equal numbers of male and female characters should populate Saturday morning cartoons.

Settings and Plots

Children's developing conceptions of social reality are not only impacted by character depicitons in Saturday morning cartoons, but by the ways in which society in general is portrayed. Important elements in determining this latter category are setting and plot.

By most definitions, the term "setting" encompasses both place and time. In either respect, settings can be further differentiated as either *integral* or *backdrop* (Donelson & Nilsen, 1989). An integral setting is one which is highly specified and an essential part of the plot itself, as in the case of many fantasies and historical stories. In *The Wizard of Oz*, for example, the setting is almost a character itself. Backdrop settings, on the other hand, are undifferentiated and generalized. When authors establish this kind of setting, they are interested in creating a neutral backdrop for their stories, to make it easier for readers to identify with and participate in its action.

TABLE 5
Specificity of Settings in Saturday Morning Cartoons

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**
integral settings	3/13	23.1%	5/14	35.7%
background settings	10/13	76.9%	9/14	64.3%

The vast majority of settings in the Saturday morning cartoons we reviewed were of the latter, background, variety (TABLE 5). Except for a part of one segment in the *Muppet Babies*, none of the cartoons we reviewed were set in a specific time. Rather all, as evidenced by dialogue, characterizations, and props, seemed to take place in an indeterminate present. Only five of the

twenty-one different programs reviewed over both years (3 shown in 1990 and 5 shown in 1992) were set in a specific location. These five included the *New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Captain 'N and Super Mario Brothers*, *Yo, Yogi*, and *Land of the Lost*; programs, it could be argued, adapted from original material in which place was too important to be homogenized. It should also be noted that with the exception of *Yo, Yogi*'s "Jellystone Park," all these settings are fantastical. (Bokan, 1992)

The common use of background settings in the Saturday morning programming we reviewed would seem to indicate that its creators were more interested in developing a sense of immediacy and generality then in setting their stories in a particular place and time. Deliberate vagueness or stereotyping of setting allows viewers to fill in gaps with personal experience and more closely involve themselves in the action of the characters. The use of backdrop settings in Saturday morning programming, then, like the iconic nature of its characters, adds to the likelihood that the social reality depicted therein will be internalized and assimilated. Indeed, in the majority of the cartoon programs we reviewed, physical setting merely provided generalized parameters in which their action took place.

To examine such parameters a little more closely, program raters were asked to distinguish the settings of each program segment as *rural*, *suburban*, *urban*, or *fantastic* (Bokan, 1992). Because many of the cartoons we reviewed contained fantastic elements -- monsters, robots, dinosaurs, etc. -- a cartoon setting was deemed fantastic only when the setting itself would not exist in the real world. The physical surroundings in *Captain N and Super Mario*, for example, are the inner workings of video games, a fairly fantastic premise. Similarly, *Winnie the Pooh* takes place in a realm of stuffed animals. While the settings of both these programs are formally vaguely rural, the premises establishing them are essentially fantastic. On the other hand, *Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters* contains many fantastic characters, but its settings and the premises which underlie them are essentially urban. Finally, in *Beetlejuice*, we found two distinct settings -- the ghoulish "Beetleworld," and the suburban Peaceful Pines. *Beetlejuice* was therefore listed once as having a fantastic setting, and once as having a suburban setting.

To take into consideration, however, the fantastic elements that we did find in many Saturday morning programs, raters were additionally asked to note these. For these purposes, fantastic elements were considered to be magical, monstrous, and/or mechanical entities, and not the talking animals who commonly populate cartoons. Two raters reviewed each program and no discrepancies between ratings were found. The results of the rating process are summarized in TABLE 6.

TABLE 6
Settings in Saturday Morning Cartoons

CLASSIFICATION	SEPT 15, 1990 NUMBER*	SEPT 15, 1990 PERCENT	JUNE 9, 1992 NUMBER*	JUNE 9, 1992 PERCENT
rural	2/14	14.3%	3^{1}/15	20.0%
suburban	2/14	14.3%	5^{2}/15	33.3%
urban	6^{3}/14	42.8%	2^{2}/15	13.4%
fantastic	4/14	28.6%	5/15	33.3%
total fantastic or fantastic elem.	**7/14**	**50.0%**	**10/15**	**66.7%**

* total numbers of shows include Beetlejuice counted both as suburban and fantastical; superscripts indicate numbers of shows in a category whose settings include fantastical elements

The results of our analyses of cartoon settings are perhaps most interesting in the changes they show over time. In 1990, cartoon settings were predominantly urban and fantastic; in 1992, they were predominantly suburban and fantastic. There was also a decided growth in programs featuring fantastical elements over this two year period. Such findings suggest a retreat to the suburbs and the fantastical, and, by implication, a corresponding fear of cities. Indeed, by 1992, the only two shows with urban settings were *Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, shows in which urban landscapes take on a decidedly sinister quality and the main characters live in fortress-like headquarters from which they emerge only to fight urban evil.

The settings of Saturday morning cartoons, then, would seem to suggest to children that one lives in the suburbs, dreams of the country, and fears the city. Indeed, such notions, however unrealistic, are probably a part of the American psyche in general. It is none-the-less disturbing, however, because of the background nature of cartoon settings and the nature of their audience. As previously stated, children have little knowledge or experience of the larger world. When that larger world is presented to them in generalized forms that over and over again associate cities with evil, chances are they will internalize such associations, most likely at deep levels. In a similar vein, the growing number of fantastical (and scary) elements in Saturday morning programming can not help but increase children's generalized fears of the larger world.

Another element in Saturday morning cartoons which effects their portrayal of society is the general nature of their plot structures. Of all the elements in a cartoon, plot is probably most

variable, but the very simplicity of form found in Saturday morning programs makes it possible to draw some conclusions about the nature of their plots. One particular distinction that can be made concerning cartoon plots seems especially relevant to the concepts of social reality they portray. This is a distinction between *action/adventure* and *situational* plots. Program raters were asked to note such differences, and again no discrepancies were found between raters.

TABLE 7
Kinds of Plots in Saturday Morning Cartoons

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER***	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER***	**PERCENT**
action/adventure	5/14	35.7%	9/15	60.0%
situational (comedy/drama)	9/14	64.3%	6/15	40.0%

* total numbers of shows include Beetlejuice counted both as action/adventure and situational in both years

TABLE 7 distinguishes between cartoons whose plot structures were based on an action/adventure model and cartoons whose plot structures were situationally grounded. Cartoon plots were considered action/ adventure when their structures centered on violent treats to society, usually in the form of fantastical monsters or machines, that were neutralized through the violent actions of the cartoon's heroes. Plots considered situational were those which revolved around everyday situations. Whether comedic or dramatic, situational plots were generally set in motion by misunderstandings and/or misguided actions, or by contests or conflicts between characters, and typically ended with a simple moral message.

Differences between the kinds of plots found in Saturday morning programming, like differences in settings, are most interesting when viewed over time. They also reveal similar trends. In 1990, situational plots were common to nearly twice as many programs as action/adventure plots. In 1992, action/adventure plots outnumbered situational ones by fifty percent. It would appear that society as portrayed in cartoons got a good deal meaner and scarier between 1990 and 1992. Cartoon society also got more violent and more ready to accept violence as a solution to social problems. Such portrayal only exasperates children's fears. What is even more disturbing about this trend is its movement away from concepts of personal responsibility (i.e. character flaws can get you into trouble; personal strengths can get you out) and towards notions of victimization. While all these tendencies may mirror similar changes in the larger

society, it is hard to believe they are positive in either arena. Indeed, it could be easily argued that presenting such images to children only insures that the trends will continue.

Values and Morality

The work of childhood is learning to be a member of the culture in which one finds him or herself. In the previous sections of this chapter, we explored cartoon portrayals of what could be called the surface features of modern American culture -- what Saturday morning cartoons are teaching children about everyday relations in the larger world. In this section and the next, we will examine cartoon treatments of the belief systems, the currents if you will, which underlie and support that surface.

Stories have always been a primary means through which the values and beliefs of peoples have been passed from generation to generation. Consider, for example, Aesop's fables, or Nordic myth, or the parables of the New Testament. This is not to say that children do not learn values and mores primarily from their immediate families, or that individual families do not pass along to their children their own particular interpretations of the same, but rather that the larger culture encodes its values and beliefs in stories which are passed from generation to generation. Once upon a time, these stories were passed down by village storytellers and traveling bards. With the advent of print, they were set and reset in books, the stories being changed and updated for succeeding generations. Today, seventy-five percent of the American population gets the majority of its information from television, and forty percent of American homes have no books at all (Costanzo, 1994). The average American child of today spends far more time with the stories found on Saturday morning cartoons than with the books -- the fairy tales, fables, myths and historical stories -- that were an important part of my childhood.

Indeed, it is important to note that the messages of Saturday morning cartoons have evolved in conscious recognition of this fact. The cartoons of the 1950s and 1960s were little more than slapstick routines made more violent by the immortal nature of animated talent (consider, for example, *Bugs Bunny*, *Daffy Duck*, the *Road Runner*, *Tom and Jerry*, even *Huckleberry Hound*). It is precisely because concerned parents and educators recognized the growing cultural importance of Saturday morning programming and put pressure on broadcasters to produce "socially responsible" cartoons (Kaye, 1979) that the kinds of stories found in today's programming were developed. Thus, the social reality depicted in Saturday morning cartoons is also "derived" in this sense; its moral messages were to a greater or lesser extent engineered in response to public pressure.

To analyze the values and belief systems expounded in the stories found in Saturday morning programming, program raters were asked to summarize the plots of all the stories in each program they reviewed, and to note the primary and secondary themes embedded therein in terms of the values they seemed to support. Two raters reviewed each program and discrepancies between judgments were resolved by the author with reference to the program tapes (Guadagno & Swan, 1992).

So what are the stories found in Saturday morning programming like? In many ways, these stories are very similar to traditional fairy tales and fables -- they tend to combine realistic problems with fantastic solutions; they explore both specific ethical dilemmas and the nature of good and evil itself; they are populated with talking animals, monsters, and magic. In many ways, what we have called situational plots resembled those of traditional fables. They tended to have very simple structures that focused on a particular social message, often explored through humor, and most could be summed up with an aphorism (i.e. "courage comes from within," "bigger is not always better," "things are not always what they seem"). Similarly, what we have called action/adventure plots in many ways resembled traditional myths and fairy tales. They were uniformly concerned with threats to society itself, usually in monstrous form, which were defeated by heroic action and magic powers.

In many ways, however, the stories we found in Saturday morning cartoons were quite different from those found in traditional children's stories, and, in many ways, these differences are what is most interesting about them.

The biggest difference between classic children's stories, between the cartoons we remember from our childhoods, for that matter, and the Saturday morning cartoons of today, involves a quite dramatic change from an individual to a group focus. Classic children stories focus on individual protagonists. In traditional fairy tales and myths, the plots follow individual heroes and their struggles to save society and "find" themselves. Traditional fables typically deal with character traits as embodied in individual characters.

To explore differences in focus in cartoon stories, program raters were asked to distinguish between programs whose stories had an individual focus and those whose stories had a group focus. There were no discrepancies between raters. TABLE 8 summarizes their findings. It shows that in both 1990 and 1992, the overwhelming majority of cartoons plots, more than three quarters of these in both years, were focused on the behaviors of groups.

TABLE 8
Unit Focus in Saturday Morning Cartoons

CLASSIFICATION	SEPT 15, 1990 NUMBER	SEPT 15, 1990 PERCENT	JUNE 9, 1992 NUMBER	JUNE 9, 1992 PERCENT
individual focus	3/13	23.1%	3/14	21.5%
group focus	10/13	76.9%	11/14	78.5%

In all the action/adventure cartoons we reviewed, good was embodied in a group of more or less equals, not in an individual. In all, it was through the collective action of such heroes that evil was defeated and society restored, and more often than not, it was attempts at solitary action that got the whole group into trouble in the first place. Good in Saturday morning cartoons is democratic. Conversely, evil in action/adventure cartoons we reviewed was embodied in an individual, albeit sometimes an individual with stooges. The villains of the cartoons we watched were typically isolated from society. If they were several, there was always a single autocratic leader, the "embodiment of evil" so to speak, and many mindless underlings. Evil on Saturday mornings is not democratic.

In terms of actions, however, there was little to distinguish heroes from villains in these programs. The villains used trickery, violence, intelligence, and magic to try to take over society and destroy the heroes; the heroes used trickery, violence, intelligence, and magic to defeat them. Although all the action/adventure cartoon plots we reviewed seemed to have a good vs. evil theme, neither good nor evil was clearly distinguished in terms of particular character traits of their heroes or villains, nor were such behaviors plot devices. The heroes of Saturday morning did not possess good character traits (i.e. faith, pureness of heart, charity, etc.) that were responsible for their eventual triumph. Likewise, the villains were not motivated by character flaws (i.e. jealousy, greed, lust, etc.). At most, Saturday morning villains seemed to want power for its own sake, while its heroes were content to share power.

Indeed, even the stories in cartoons with what we have termed situational plots, even the stories in those very few cartoons we thought still preserved an individual focus through strong characterizations (i.e. *Garfield and Friends*, *Beetlejuice*, *Yo Yogi*, and *Muppet Babies*), were essentially stories about groups and group relationships. Most often, all these situational stories revolved around primary themes of friendship, loyalty, and cooperation -- group values. We also found a variety of what might be called secondary themes in the cartoons we examined. One

recurrent secondary theme concerned the importance of education; another involved careful thinking (i.e. "don't jump to conclusions," "think out the consequences of your actions"). Other secondary themes we discerned included good sportsmanship, courage, kindness, responsibility, self-worth, persistence, and concern for the environment.

These various secondary themes and the values they emphasized were positive ones that we would want instilled in our children, and, unlike plot development in action/adventure stories, they were central to situational plots. Because of the secondary nature of such positive character portrayals, however, and because they tended to be developed within stories that were primarily concerned with group relationships, individual values and individualism itself were at best ignored. At worst, individualism seemed portrayed as a negative character trait. As was the case in their action/adventure counterparts, the more negative characters in situational cartoons tended to act alone, and group members frequently got themselves into trouble by doing the same.

An interesting contrast, however, can be observed between the group dominated messages of Saturday morning cartoons and the public service messages embedded in cartoon programming (Meurs & Griffis, 1992). The public service messages in the programming we reviewed were produced by both the networks and outside agencies. They were generally fifteen to thirty second spots, mixed in with commercials during program breaks, that focused on many of the same topics as the secondary themes in the cartoon programs themselves -- the importance of education, self worth, concern for the environment, etc.

TABLE 9
Public Service Messages in Saturday Morning Cartoons

	SEPT 15, 1990		JUNE 9, 1992	
CLASSIFICATION	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**	**NUMBER**	**PERCENT**
school/reading	5	31.3%	8	42.1%
nutrition	2	12.5%	3	15.8%
drugs	2	12.5%	2	10.5%
social	2	12.5%	0	0.0%
safety	1	6.2%	5	26.3%
environment	2	12.5%	0	0.0%
community agencies	2	12.5%	1	5.3%
TOTAL MESSAGES	**16**	**100.0%**	**19**	**100.0%**

What was interesting about these messages was that their primary thrust, in direct contrast with that of the cartoons with which they were shown, involved individual responsibility.

Messages about drugs, for example, focused on not giving in to peer pressure; environmental and safety messages emphasized the differences an individual can make; what we termed social messages concerned "being yourself." It must be remembered that these public service messages accounted for less than seven minutes out of nine hours of programming time. Still, they stand in curious contrast to the group dominated themes of the cartoons themselves. A complete category breakdown of public service messages is shown in TABLE 9.

Another big difference between Saturday morning cartoons and classic children's stories is the former's lack of a sense of history. Classic children's literature has always included not only illusions to historical characters and events, but historical stories themselves. Among the well remembered stories of my own childhood, for example, were American stories -- some mythical (i.e. John Henry, Paul Bunyan, Rip Van Winkle), some historical (i.e. the Boston Tea Party, Appomattox, Prince Joseph), some a little of both (Johnnie Appleseed, George Washington and the cherry tree, Harriet Tubman).

There are no American stories, there aren't even any characters from or illusions to them, or any other history for that matter, in Saturday morning cartoons. This complete lack of any sense of history is another radical departure from traditional children's literature, even from the cartoons of the past. It is also, I believe, a serious failing in Saturday morning programming. A people's history is an important part of their culture. What better way to teach values and beliefs than to embed them in historical stories? Perhaps Saturday morning cartoon's lack of a sense of the past stems from their derived nature, from their engineering. Perhaps they lack historical sense because they lack a history themselves. On the other hand, it may be that in this respect, too, Saturday morning cartoons simply reflect the larger culture, which similarly seems to be loosing its sense of history.

A final significant difference between traditional children's stories and Saturday morning cartoons is that traditional stories, fairy tales in particular, address psychological issues of special importance to the developing child. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim (1976) argues that what children urgently need from their stories are not lessons in cooperative behavior, but the assurance that they can succeed; that monsters can be slain, injustice remedied, obstacles overcome. Fairy tales, he maintains, give children this assurance precisely because their fantastic dangers are rooted in a child's worst psychological fears -- the fear of being abandoned, the fear of powerful adults, the fear of their own negative impulses. When the protagonists of such epics face and dramatically defeat those dangers, their audience vicariously learns that they can overcome and defeat their own fearfulness. Saturday morning cartoons, even the action/adventure type programs

which on the surface seem to resemble fairy tales, fail to meet a child's psychological needs for two important reasons.

Firstly, they fail to address children's real fears. Threats to society are an adult issue, a child's issues involve threats to him or herself. In addition, an important part of a child's fears are the isolation he or she feels in the face of them. The heroes of fairy tales struggle alone to overcome evil, and so reassure children that they can overcome their fears. The group dominated plots of action/adventure cartoons, especially their repeated suggestion that solitary individuals can never by themselves overcome evil, can only serve to increase such fears.

Secondly, unlike fairy tale endings, the endings of Saturday morning cartoons hold no real punishment for the wicked. In action/adventure stories, evil doers are, at best, sent back to some other dimension; at worst, they escape to terrorize the heroes again. In like manner, the endings of Saturday morning action/adventure cartoons hold no real rewards for their heroes; their lives just return to conditions as they were at the beginning of the story. Similarly, in situational plots, negative characters and/or actions are merely frustrated, and the only rewards are lessons learned. Bettelheim argues that, for children, only severe punishment fits the crimes they believe have been committed against them, and only substantial benefits can adequately reward their heroic efforts to prevail. In the prosocial world of Saturday morning cartoons there is no real punishment, no real rewards, hence, no justice. If Bettelheim is right, the message that there is no justice in the world cannot be one we want to be sending our children.

In any case, the overwhelming message, the ubiquitous moral in the Saturday morning programming we examined was that acting with the group is good, acting on your own is evil. Walter Karp (1987, pgs. 439, 440) writes, "In every conceivable way, children are taught the pro-social virtues of cooperation, self-effacement, and subservience to the group. ... [The] message is perfectly plain: the lone individual is weak and helpless; the group is strong and kind." Karp goes on to argue that Saturday morning programming is thus "systematic training for personal weakness and social subservience. It promotes conformity and saps inner strength. It teaches the children of a free people to look to the group for their opinions and to despise those who do not do the same." (pg. 444)

Karp, of course, is exaggerating to make a point, but he does have one. Clearly, the cooperative group values espoused in Saturday morning cartoons can be very positive, especially when viewed against the kinds of violent and aggressive behaviors psychologists have found to result from the viewing of violent, aggressive, and highly individualistic cartoons. In addition, the

associations between democratic groups and good and autocratic individuals and evil developed in Saturday morning programming can be seen as fostering democratic behaviors. On the other hand, submission to a group is not always positive; consider, for example, Nazi Germany, street gangs, or some of the more radical religious communities in this country today. Group related values, especially in a democracy, need to be balanced against individual responsibility and respect for the individual, something that was done very little, if at all, in the themes of Saturday morning programs we examined.

For well or ill, such group dominated messages are a radical departure both from Western storytelling tradition, in which the hero typically embarks on a solitary quest to rescue society and/or prove his or her character, and the traditional American ethos of rugged individualism. That it was also a conscious departure is yet another difference between classic children's stories and the stories found in Saturday morning cartoons. Perhaps the real problem here is that Saturday morning cartoons never truly evolved into classic children's stories in the first place, but were rather engineered according to artificial codes, however well intentioned, into pseudo-stories. Perhaps they may yet evolve to messier but richer and more classic forms. On the other hand, perhaps the group dominated messages of Saturday morning cartoons are merely a reflection of the corporate models which dominate so much of our advanced capitalist society. Perhaps such messages, like ethnic and gender depictions in cartoons, merely reflect power relationships in the world as it is.

Consumerism

The previous section of this chapter explored the values and belief systems embedded in and communicated through the stories developed in Saturday morning cartoons. This section examines the ways in which Saturday morning programming itself supports the consumerism that lies at the very heart of our culture.

The United States boasts the most fully developed commercial broadcasting system in the world. It is paid for, and so to a greater or lesser degree controlled by, companies that manufacture and sell commercial products. What they are buying is increased consumer demand for their wares. Saturday morning programming is no exception. Can children effectively defend themselves against the impact of commercials? Many researchers in the field think not. Goldberg and Gorn (1983), for example have established a causal link between children's exposure to an advertised product and their efforts to obtain it, and, more importantly perhaps, between children's exposure to advertising and other generalized purchase related behaviors. The more television

children watch, they report, the more stuff they want. The National Institute of Mental Health's (1982) survey of research on children and advertising supports such claim.

Findings such as these have led groups like Action for Children's Television (Kaye, 1979) to campaign long and hard for rules governing advertising in Saturday morning programming. These efforts led to the passage of the Children's Television Act of 1990 which limits the amount of time that can be devoted to commercial messages in Saturday morning programming to two minutes per half hour. But is this time limit, limit enough? Is it really possible to take commercialism out of children's programming in a system so ubiquitously commercial? For that matter, do we really want to? To begin exploring some of these issues we recorded and categorized all the commercial messages shown between 8:00 am and 11:00 am on all three major television networks on Saturday, September 15, 1990 and again on Saturday, June 9, 1992 (after the Children's Television Act took effect). Our findings (Greenless & Swan, 1992) are summarized in TABLE 10.

TABLE 10
Commercials in Saturday Morning Cartoons

CLASSIFICATION	SEPT 15, 1990 NUMBER	SEPT 15, 1990 PERCENT	JUNE 9, 1992 NUMBER	JUNE 9, 1992 PERCENT
sugar foods & beverages	67	36.2%	75	46.6%
junk food	19	10.3%	39	24.2%
total other foods	10	5.4%	15	9.3%
total food & beverages	**96**	**51.9%**	**129**	**80.1%**
toys	70	37.8%	17	10.6%
entertainment	14	7.6%	15	9.3%
other	5	2.7%	0	0.0%
TOTAL MESSAGES	**185**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**

In 1990, commercial messages accounted for a little more than five minutes out of every half hour of the Saturday morning programming we reviewed. In that year, we counted 185 commercials broadcast during the nine hours of cartoon programs we watched. The average number of repetitions of a particular commercial was three. In 1992, advertisers were limited to two minutes of commercial messages in every half hour of Saturday morning programming. In that year, we counted 161 commercials broadcast during the nine hours of cartoon programs we watched. The average number of repetitions of a particular commercial was three. In addition, the number of transitions, and so the number of different images shown within individual commercials,

also remained essentially unchanged across these two years. Thus, we found that the Children's Television Act did very little to change the numbers of commercial messages with which children are bombarded on Saturday mornings. What happened was that advertisers simply compressed their messages from thirty seconds to fifteen seconds, speeding up the images contained therein accordingly. It did, however, result in changes in the content of those messages.

In 1990, food and beverage commercials accounted for a little more than half the total number of commercials shown; commercials for toys accounted for the bulk of the remaining commercials, almost forty percent of the total. In 1992, food and beverage commercials accounted for eighty percent of the total number of commercials shown, and commercials for toys had fallen to just ten percent of the total. Thus, while before the Children's Television Act went into effect, there were almost as many toy commercials as food and beverage commercials shown during Saturday morning programming, after it went into effect, food and beverage commercials accounted for the overwhelming majority of commercials. Although the absolute numbers of commercials shown during that time period dropped slightly, the absolute numbers of commercials for food and beverages rose by fully one third.

Our guess is that the reason for these changes is simply that advertisements for toys are not as easily compressed as advertisements for food and beverages. Toy commercials typically show a toy and what can be done with it. This requires more camera movement, longer cuts, and more time than commercials for food and beverages, which traditionally have had little to do with the products themselves and could therefore be more easily altered. The changes themselves, however, are problematic when one considers the kinds of food and beverage advertising shown during Saturday morning cartoons. In both 1990 and 1992, only about ten percent of the food and beverage advertising shown during that period was for foods we would consider nutritious (TABLE 11).

TABLE 11 shows that only 10 of the 96 food and beverage commercials shown in 1990, and only 15 of the 129 food and beverage commercials shown in 1992 were for foods we considered at all nutritious. The rest were for foods high in sugar and fat. Poor eating habits, dental cavities, and obesity are serious health problems children carry into their adult lives. Poor nutrition has immediate effects on children as well, contributing to such problems as hyperactivity, fatigue, and attention deficits which effect their progress in school. Yet, on every network, children were shown commercials pushing products that foster poor nutrition an average of nine times per hour in 1990, and an average of thirteen times an hour in 1992. In 1992, those commercials made up the vast

majority of advertising shown on Saturday mornings; the bad nutrition message wasn't even broken up with commercials for toys.

TABLE 11
Food and Beverage Commercials in Saturday Morning Cartoons

CLASSIFICATION	SEPT 15, 1990 NUMBER	SEPT 15, 1990 PERCENT	JUNE 9, 1992 NUMBER	JUNE 9, 1992 PERCENT
sugared beverages	19	19.8%	7	5.4%
cookies & candy	12	12.5%	9	7.0%
sugar cereals	36	37.5%	59	45.7%
total sugar foods	**67**	**69.8%**	**75**	**58.1%**
other cereals	3	3.1%	1	0.7%
snacks	7	7.3%	6	4.7%
fast food	12	12.5%	33	25.6%
total junk food	**19**	**19.8%**	**39**	**30.3%**
other foods	7	7.3%	14	10.9%
total sugar & junk foods	**86**	**89.6%**	**114**	**88.4%**
total nutritious foods	**10**	**10.4%**	**15**	**11.6**
total food & beverages	96	100.0%	129	100.0%

Well, one might say, at least commercials for toys were down. Or were they really? The fact is that all but one of the cartoon programs shown on Saturday mornings in both 1990 and 1992 were associated with series toys and all sorts of other commercial products for children -- lunch boxes, pencil sets, night lights, games, clothing, even books. Series toys, however, are the most insidious. These are toys that have many different figures and "playsets," each with their own differing accessories. The *Beetlejuice* series, for example, not only offers many different figures and playsets, it offers seven different Beetlejuices. Each of the packages says, "Collect them all!" Only someone who hasn't been in a toy store in the last five years could have missed the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* series; it takes up a whole aisle. Series toys began with Barbie and G.I. Joe dolls, but outside of such old standards as these, most are linked to cartoon series for a very good reason -- the series themselves provide half or full hour promotions for these products. They don't need paid advertising and they don't buy it. Indeed, when new cartoon series are developed, series toys are developed along with them.

The reduction in toy commercials by twenty minutes from 1990 to 1992 thus pales in comparison with the nearly eight hours of commercials cartoon programming itself represents. We know that children have a hard time separating fantasy and reality. Young children in particular tend to believe everything they see on television and do not really understand the nature of commercials or commercialism (Christenson & Roberts, 1983; Dorr, 1986; Beasich, Leinoff & Swan, 1992). The lack of clear delineation between advertising and entertainment can only confuse them more.

Such confusion, of course, mirrors a similar confusion in the larger "shop 'til you drop" culture in which we live, and is obviously not a confusion the advertisers who pay for Saturday morning programming are likely to want to remedy. It may not even be a confusion our advanced capitalist culture itself wants to clear up. After all, a capitalist economy needs an ever increasing demand. What better way to insure such demand than to raise new generations of avid consumers.

Discussion

Saturday morning is the only block of television time devoted exclusively to children. Saturday morning programming is therefore a primary text for children's social learning from television. What does that text teach them about the larger society and how they should behave in it?

It teaches them that white men are the most important and powerful people in that society; that women are underrepresented everywhere, that minorities are excluded in some places, that old people are incompetent and evil and best left alone. It teaches them that the world is a scary place and that its cities are the most scary of all. It teaches them to be active consumers. It teaches them that they should get a good education and show concern for the environment, that they should be courageous, kind, and persistent; but most of all it teaches them that they should belong and be loyal to a group, that they should always cooperate with group members, and that they should never act on their own.

The messages of Saturday morning, then, are not really very different from the messages of American society. But are they really the messages we want our children to hear? And if we aren't happy with these messages, is there really much we can do about it? The work of Action for Children's Television (Kaye, 1979) may be instructive in this regard.

Action for Children's Television worked long and hard to change the messages of Saturday morning programming. In some ways it was successful; in some ways it wasn't. Its lobbying efforts, for example, were successful in securing passage of the Children's Television Act of 1990, and so limiting advertising in Saturday morning programming to two minutes per hour. Its pressure on advertisers and networks to reduce the violence in cartoons resulted in a thorough reworking of cartoon formulae to produce the derived reality we see on Saturday mornings today. On the other hand, the reduction in advertising time in Saturday morning programming did not really reduce the number of advertising messages it contained, and, even if it had, such reduction would mean little in the context of whole programs that serve to promote products. The derived reality of cartoon stories, while less violent and more cooperative, is arguably scarier, and clearly lacking in both historical and psychological sense.

The work of Action for Children's Television, then, tells us that you can change children's programming, but that you don't always get what you really want. In particular, it would be foolish to think that you can change these lesser messages of a society without significantly changing that society itself. It would be foolish to think, for example, that you can change the consumerist messages of Saturday morning programming when that programming is paid for by advertisers in an advanced capitalist culture. It would be foolish to think that the power relationships and fears of American society won't be reflected in the cartoons it produces. It would also probably be foolish to think that stories engineered to meet particular standards won't meet them at the expense of other elements.

So what can be done? One thing that might be done would be to pressure networks and advertisers to produce cartoons based on traditional children's stories. We know that Saturday morning programming can be changed through this sort of pressure, and we know that most cartoons are derived from other sources anyway. I would like to see at least one series based on American history, and another based on classic children's literature. I think a series that dealt with specific values in different episodes would also be a good idea. When my own children were little, we had a series of books called *ValueTales* (Johnson, 1978) that highlighted specific values through biographies of famous people and that my children really loved. The Children's Television Act of 1990 even provides a legal basis for such pressure in that it requires the holders of television franchises to serve "the educational and informational needs of children through the licensee's overall programming, including programming specifically designed to serve such needs."

In the mean time, as parents and educators we should teach or children to view television critically. We should watch with them and talk to them about the messages in all television

programming, Saturday morning programming in particular. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman observes that no matter how bad we think television is, and he thinks it's pretty bad, it isn't going to go away. He argues that we must teach our children about the ways in which television shapes our lives, and the ways in which they can, in turn, shape it to serve our needs. He writes, "It is an acknowledged task of the schools to assist the young in learning how to interpret the symbols of their culture. That this task should now require that they learn how to distance themselves from their forms of information is not so bizarre an enterprise that we cannot hope for its inclusion in the curriculum, even hope that it will be placed at the center of education."

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